

Dear Kennebunkport Homeowner:

May 2009

In an effort to encourage the safest and most environmentally friendly methods for caring for our lawns and gardens, the Town of Kennebunkport recently adopted, as recommended policy, the Best Management Practices (BMP) for the Application of Turf Pesticides and Fertilizers.

Following these practices can go a long way towards ensuring the health of our watershed, of your family and pets, and of the lobster and fishing industries that are so important to our town.

The way each of us cares for our lawn can have an impact on us all. Many of the BMP recommendations apply to individual lawns, and we are hoping that you will join the movement to minimize reliance on weed and insect controls and to take a healthier approach to lawn care. We are including a list of 10 simple steps that you can follow as a start in that direction. And if you use a lawn care service, we've enclosed a list of 7 questions you should ask your lawn care company.



You can also visit the Conservation Commission page at [www.kennebunkportme.gov](http://www.kennebunkportme.gov) to find the following: (Select the link for "Appointed Boards")

- A complete copy of the Best Management Practices for the Application of Turf Pesticides and Fertilizer.
- A list of healthy lawn care products.
- A list of grass seed mixes that are drought, insect and weed resistant and hardy for our climate.
- A list of lawn care companies that are willing to use a sustainable approach if asked to do so by the homeowner.

You can find more information on healthy laws on the following websites:

[www.yardscaping.org](http://www.yardscaping.org)

[www.thinkfirstspraylast.org](http://www.thinkfirstspraylast.org)

Also, feel free to contact any member of the Conservation Commission. We will be happy to give you (or find for you) answers to any questions that you may have. (Board member Sarah Lachance can be e-mailed at [sarah@campaignearth.org](mailto:sarah@campaignearth.org))

It takes time for a lawn to transition from a chemically treated one to a naturally healthy one, but it's worth the effort. The goal is a lawn that takes less time to maintain, uses less water, demands less fertilizer and pest control and is safer for our surroundings.

We hope you will join in the challenge to make Kennebunkport beautiful and healthy!



Sincerely,

The Kennebunkport Conservation Commission

## TEN SIMPLE STEPS TOWARD A SAFE & HEALTHY LAWN:

1. Do a soil test to determine whether or not any supplements (potassium, phosphorus, etc.) are needed. Free soil test kits are available at Port Hardware, Ace Hardware, Town Hall, and the Police Department. (There is a small fee when you send in your sample to be analyzed.) If you must fertilize, use slow or time-release fertilizer products if at all possible, and only in the fall on established lawns.
2. Avoid the use of phosphorus unless indicated by the soil test, or when establishing a new lawn from seed. Lawns rarely need anything more than nitrogen, if that.
3. Check weather conditions before applying any fertilizer, and do not fertilize if rain is predicted (or if the ground is saturated). Use only slow or timed release nitrogen (10-0-0 on the bag). Water in lightly – no more than ¼ to ½ inch.
4. Contrary to popular belief, spring is not the best time to fertilize. At that time, nitrogen will encourage top growth at the expense of root growth, and will also encourage germination of weed seeds. If fertilizer is applied, it is best done between late August and Columbus Day. Instead, rake, de-thatch or aerate your lawn in the spring to help stimulate healthy growth and then overseed with a tall or fine fescue mix.
5. Mow your lawn in the spring when it reaches 3” or more and leave the clippings on the lawn. They’re a great source of nitrogen rich free fertilizer. Cutting higher reduces weed invasion (especially crabgrass), creates a deeper root system and helps the lawn recover faster from drought, so make 3” the norm.
6. Leave at least a 25’ buffer zone of untreated grass or other vegetation around any wells, wetlands, streams, coastal areas or other water bodies.
7. Know the size of your lawn. Strictly follow package directions and never exceed the maximum amount to be applied. Over-application of any fertilizer or pesticide, even organic products, can have a negative impact on the watershed, causing algae blooms that deplete oxygen and suffocate marine life. Never leave fertilizer, weed or insect controls on asphalt, concrete or other impervious surfaces. Sweep them back into the lawn or dispose of them according to label directions.
8. Water wisely and infrequently. If absolutely necessary, deeply soak the lawn once or twice a week with about 1” of water. Deep watering encourages strong root growth, while frequent light watering increases the potential for harmful pesticide or fertilizer runoff and encourages thatch buildup.
9. To minimize weeds, regularly overseed your lawn with fine or tall fescues, white clover and other grasses appropriate for this climate. Maximum density minimizes weeds.
10. Manage pest problems with spot applications. Don’t broadcast pesticides like grub and crabgrass control or weed and feed. Pesticides can be toxic if overused or carelessly applied, and long term effects on health are unknown. Look for biological, mechanical or physical ways to control pests instead of pesticides. Grass grown on healthy soils which is properly mown will seldom have pest problems

## **SEVEN QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LAWN CARE COMPANY:**

If you use a lawn care service and would like to have your lawn cared for in a healthy way, you can ask the following questions:

1. Will you do a soil test before applying any fertilizers? Find a company that applies fertilizer only when test results show that it's needed.
2. Are insect and weed control products applied on a fixed schedule? If so, this is not the company to hire, since weather conditions and the extent of the problem should be considered in any application program.
3. Do you use non-chemical controls where possible? Use spot treatments instead of broadcast applications? Use watering, mowing and aeration methods that improve grass plant health?
4. Are you licensed by the Board of Pesticides Control? An applicator must be licensed in order to apply pesticides on a "for-hire" basis. (Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides, "weed and feed" products, fungicides and others)
5. Are you willing to mow higher and be flexible when you mow? Water only when needed?
6. Can you make suggestions for a more sustainable or ecological lawn? For reducing lawn size? For planting native species?
7. Are you aware of Kennebunkport's recommended Best Management Practices, and are you willing to follow them?

Above all, avoid the "one size fits all" approach to lawn care. Not every lawn is the same, and a reliable contractor should be able to tailor a program to fit your requirements.

Visit the Conservation Commission's page at [www.kennebunkportme.gov](http://www.kennebunkportme.gov) (select the link for "Appointed Boards") to find a list of lawn care companies that are willing to use sustainable approach if asked to do so by the homeowner.